

Year after year

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You play a family living through years of political, social and technological upheaval. How will you get caught up in it – and how will it change your relationships? The game starts a few years into the future, but will gradually move decades ahead.

Year after year is best with 3-5 players, and you'll want 4 hours or more to play. It works well for one-shot play, or a short campaign.

Create your family

Each player creates one family member. Most of you should be adults, and all should be either blood relations or occupying a role of equivalent closeness (stepfather, adopted sibling, godparent, etc).

Choose a role or create your own:

- The elder (the oldest family member)
- The carer (the one who occupied the parental role when the current generation were kids)
- The rock of stability (the reliable, sensible one who everyone looks up to)
- The wild child (the one who breaks all the rules and gets away with it)
- The prodigal (the one who has been away doing exciting things)
- The brat (pampered and doted on, always gets what they want)
- The golden child (the one everyone expects great things of)
- The moral compass (principled and outspoken conscience of the family)
- The baby (a child, growing up in difficult times, who will come into themselves as the game progresses, and likely consider as normal things that the others see as strange or shocking)

Create a few other key family members. Adult siblings, children, uncles/aunts, family friends and so on. Give them a role too.

You should say if you're someone's sibling, parent, spouse or similar, but beyond that you do not need to create individual relationships between the characters at this stage. The default should be that you respond to other characters according to the role they chose. We'll discover the detail of each relationship from how you react to each other in play.

Current affairs

Before you start playing through scenes, create some initial current events for your characters to react to and/or be affected by or caught up in.

When you do this, each player creates one **change** that has occurred or been going on in the last few years prior to your first gathering:

- A national or global **political event**. This could be a flashpoint like an assassination or news story, or it could be a prolonged pattern like the rise of a new political party or waves of immigration.
- A **social trend**. This one has to be a broader pattern of behaviour rather than an event, though you could describe an event that prompts it.
- A new piece of **technology**. Again, this could be a single thing like the the creation of the first self-aware AI, or a wider trend like wearable technology.
- A major **catastrophe**. As before, a single event like an earthquake or bombing is valid, as is a prolonged trend like global heatwaves.

In each case, make sure you spell out what the significance of your change is. If you create a political party, we want to know what they're doing that characters might object to (or support) or that might affect their lives. Thing big, make it disruptive. Remember the game starts a few years into the future, so you can insert any new development – expected or unexpected – that could happen in that time-frame.

After each change has been created, everyone should say what effect it has had on them personally or how they're personally involved. Not everyone has to be involved in everything. Your involvement might be secret or happening behind the scenes, if so you still tell everyone about it but let them know their characters wouldn't be aware. Even so, even secret stuff may bleed out a bit – think about what they would know or might notice and tell them that too.

Feel free to react to other people's responses too. If your character's husband says they're away working nights developing a new piece of technology, then you can say how that affects you even if the technology itself is irrelevant to your character.

You don't need to share your character's opinions at this stage. Save that for the scenes.

The changes you've created should help to provide fuel for your next gathering. Issues to discuss, and life events to announce or pick over. If you've got to the end of the process without anything new having happened to your character, stop for a moment and have a think. Is there anything you've covered that maybe your character was involved in or affected by after all? If not, come up with something totally unrelated – a new job, new relationship, something mundane. Perhaps you'll be able to weave it into future events, or perhaps it is just the normal mundania of everyday life.

The gathering

Every cycle of play starts with a family gathering.

Decide together:

- What the event is? (religious or other festival, funeral/wedding, family holiday, etc)
- Where is it?

- Are any key family members missing? (Has anyone died recently or can't be there? Why?)
- Who else is there (lovers and life partners, new children, friends, etc)

Scenes

Scenes at the gathering alternate between:

- Round-the-table scenes
- Breakout scenes

You should wait for at least two moves (see below) to be made before starting any breakout scenes.

Round-the-table scenes are the core of the game – everyone is there, eating a meal or sitting in the living room together, or similar. You can move the group to different locations/occasions during roughly the same time period, if it seems appropriate: perhaps initially you're at the funeral, then at the reception party that follows, then at breakfast the following day.

Breakout scenes are interactions between a smaller number of characters, that take place away from the main group. They might be happening in a quiet moment in a side-room alongside the big gathering. Alternatively they might be something that happened at a different location. Continuing the funeral example, perhaps two of you went off to the pub after the reception, and then a different group could be in the car together driving home after the event. Breakout scenes can be flashbacks/flashforwards, either during or immediately before or after. Keeping a totally faithful chronology isn't terribly important. With that said, don't set scenes many months before the gathering, or long after.

Both types of scene work in fundamentally the same way, the only real difference is that round-the-table scenes are witnessed by the whole group while breakout scenes can have an element of privacy from the other characters.

Framing and playing a scene

Start a scene by saying where it's happening and who is there. This will probably be pretty obvious from context but it's helpful to make it clear to everyone.

Before starting the first scene at a gathering, choose one person to lead off the scene. That person should make a move from the list below early on, to get things started and so there isn't a prolonged wait while everyone makes small talk. Choose someone who has an idea they're excited to bring up. If nobody volunteers then select someone at random. That person has the job of inventing something for their character to say, selecting from the moves list.

Once the scene has started, simply play your character by saying what they say. Mostly this isn't an action-oriented game, but you may sometimes wish to narrate what your character is doing if it adds colour to your words.

When you're playing your character, you can and should make one of these moves:

- Make an **announcement**, share some **news**, or reveal a **secret**.
- Confront someone about something or bring up an old bone of contention.
- **Offer an unsolicited opinion** (positive or negative) on someone's life choices.
- **Express strong feelings** about something that's happened recently.

These moves provide grist for discussion and emotion. Without them you've mostly got a pretty dull family gathering, so go for it and bring out your dirty laundry. Of course you may find that someone else gets there first. Feel free to treat that as them stealing your thunder in character, if you wish.

During scenes, especially in the early part of the game, you will have to invent details. For instance, you may not have anything obvious to announce: in that case, invent something! Perhaps you are expecting a new child, or you have a new job. Build on what's already been established for preference, but if you find yourself with nothing to say then make something up. This goes for your feelings, too – you should always assume that your character has a strong view about pretty much everything brought up at the family gathering. Decide what it is on a whim if need be, and throw yourself into that opinion, even if you didn't know you had it five seconds ago.

When someone makes one of the above moves or otherwise says something provocative, you can and should make one of these reactions:

- **Judge them harshly**, telling them why they're wrong/pathetic/a hypocrite, etc.
- **Raise them up**, telling them why they're right/inspiring/etc
- **Process your feelings out loud** in response to whatever they said: shock, delight, worry, etc.
- Make a **move** of your own.
- Say how an **NPC reacts**.
- If there's already enough going on, consider **sitting quietly** but decide your own inward reaction, saving it up for a future scene or later outburst.

As before, you may have to make quick decisions about how your character feels here. Don't dwell on getting the "right" response to someone else's move. After all in real life not everyone gives a rational response, sometimes they behave in unexpected ways. Choose a reaction and then worry about how to justify it to yourself as your character later on.

At any time you may call for a breakout scene to act as a vehicle for a move or reaction, but (as noted above) you should wait until at least two moves have been made in the round-the-table scene first. During breakout scenes you may wish to ask other players to play NPCs, if their main character isn't present in the scene.

Some key principles

It's important to lean into strong reactions. Family gatherings can be boring, if everyone just gets along and shares their news without ruffling feathers. So the key principle here is to **have a strong opinion about everything**. It isn't necessary for everything to descend into a bun-fight but scenes in this game are driven by dissent and emotion.

However it is very important that you're playing a family who love and care for each other. Undoubtedly there will be grudges and hurt feelings at times, even serious estrangement. But the game will be dull if you simply descend into undiluted backbiting. So try to make sure that **everything comes from a place of love**, even when you're being critical of each other.

Winding time forward

When you've had enough fun with the current family gathering and surrounding breakout scenes, or if you're nearing the end of the current session (30 minutes before the end is a good time to stop playing scenes) it's time to wind time forward.

You're going to skip over about 4 years of your characters' lives, and montage-style see what's changed in the world and how it has affected them, before returning to a new family gathering.

Go back to the "current affairs" section above, and carry out the same steps you did at the start of the game. Each introduce one change, and then react to the changes you've created. You can bring in brand new stuff, but consider building on and developing at least some the changes you've already introduced. Make them more extreme, more ubiquitous, and drive them towards whatever future state you think they'll end up in. As the changes get bigger and more powerful, you'll end up with a future that's completely unrecognisable.

Once everyone has created a change, begin a fresh cycle by creating a new gathering and playing scenes as before. If you waited until the end of the session to wind time forward, then your next session will start with a new gathering.

Endgame

When you're ready to finish the game, finish the current round of scenes and then, instead of winding time forward in the usual way, play through an epilogue that either makes the changes permanent or tears them down.

Each player in turn chooses one change (it needn't be one they created), and says whether it continues to accelerate, becomes a permanent status quo, or is destroyed in a wave of upheaval. Describe what that looks like. When your turn comes up, try to pick a change that hasn't already been covered, but if you're just itching to add to someone else's change then you can do that.

In response to each such decision, as usual everyone should say how their character is involved or affected.

Finally, each player says how their character ends up – if that hasn't already come out. This is the bit at the end of the series where we see a still of that character and a little bit of text telling us how they came to a sticky end or settled down to raise cattle, or whatever it might be.

You may also want to do this with any significant NPCs that have come up in the game, but this is entirely optional. If you do, you should invite views rather than simply deciding what happens to them.